DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 007 FL 015 772

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TITLE Arabic and English Imperative Structures.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 10p.; In: Proceedings of the Annual Linguistics Conference (3rd, Irbid, Jordan, April 1-3, 1984); see FL 015 768.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Arabic; Comparative Analysis; Contrastive Linguistics; *English; Grammar; *Sentence Structure; Structural Analysis (Linguistics); *Verbs
IDENTIFIERS *Imperatives (Grammar)

ABSTRACT

This paper studies the variety of Arabic imperative sentences, which are seen as the result of an interrelated set of choices made from a limited number of binary systems, and analyzes their occurrence in different situations. Where possible, relevant features of Arabic imperative structures are compared with their nearest English equivalents. The conditions which determine the choice of one or the other of paired imperative structures are set out. These conditions include specification, impatience, person, insistence, and negation. The analysis covers both formal and colloquial utterances. (MSE)

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ARABIC AND ENGLISH IMPERATIVE STRUCTURES

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Traditional studies of Arabic imperative sentences are unsatisfactory in two major respects; they fail to distinguish between different types of imperative sentences and they study notionally such individual grammatical categories as fi^{c}l ul-?amr "the imperative form of the verb" and al-munaada "the vocative" without considering each as a part of a system and functioning by reasons of relationships within that system (Cf. Abdul Hamid, 1963 and Abbas, 1980).

Furthermore, the vocative is often given as a primary sentence type (cf. Abdul Hamid, 1963) and the imperative is relegated to a minor position. Also subordinated are the categories of negation, which have formal exponents.

The purpose of the present article is to study the variety of Arabic imperative sentences seen as the result of interrelated set of choices from a limited number of binary systems and to account for their occurrence in situations. Some attempt will also be made to compare relevant features of Arabic imperative structures with their nearest English equivalents.

The conditions which determine the choice of one or the other of paired imperative structures are set out below:-

A. Specification

(i) Specified - this type can be uttered initially in a dialogue and is characterized by the presence of the imperative verb-form followed by a vocative noun phrase, e.g., ?uktub, ya salim. In form, a vocative may be:-

(a) single name with or without a title:
Hasan, sayyid/?ustaath Hasan
"Mr. Hasan".

(b) standard appellatives such as nouns indicative of family relationships:
^{c}ammi "my uncle", ?abi "father", ?ummi "mother", ?axi "brother" or more familiar forms jamma "mother", jaaba "father", jaxuuj "brother".

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(c) markers of profession or status: duktoor "doctor", sitt "Madam".

(d) post-modifying relative clause illi rama ilwaraqa, jaHDur huna, "whoever threw the piece of paper, come here".

Greater politeness and friendliness is expressed by a term of address (often accompanied by an adjective):

ya Tawiil al-^{C}umr, ya ^{C}aziizi, "dear",
ya Sadiiqi "friend", ya ?axi "brother",
ya ?axi il^{C}aziiz, "dear brother".

The vocative may take an initial, medial or final position in the sentence, e.g.

ya Hasan ?id$_{1}$lis huna "Hasan, sit here".
?id$_{1}$lis ja Hasan huna "sit, Hasan, here".
?id$_{1}$lis huna ja Hasan "sit here, Hasan".

(ii) Unspecified:

Type (ii) is characterized by possible optional extension by deferential forms, e.g.

?iftaH ilbaab, "open the door".
?iftaH ilbaab/ ?itha samaHt "open the door, please".
haat ilmastara min faDlak, "Give me the ruler, please".

B. Impatience

(i) Impatient:- characterized by the presence of the 2nd pers. pronoun + nominal clause

?ant ya Hasan (yalli maa btisma^{C}) ta^{C}aal huna. "You, Hasan (who do not listen) come here".

These commands frequently express strong irritation or annoyance. The pronoun ?ant is given greater prominence, by stress and/or pause before uttering the command.

(ii) Patient - realized by the absence of ?ant "you", or the post modifying negative nominal clause.

C. Person

(i) First Person Inclusive: formed by preposing the form da^{C} + pronominal suffix (-ni, -hu, -hum, -hunna, -ha) or by the more

colloquial form xall - + pronoun suffix, followed by a verbal noun or an imperfect form of the verb:

-da^{C}na nabda? il ʔaan (formal)

xalliina nibda hassa (colloquial)

"let's start now".

-da^{C}na naktub iddars (formal)

xalliina nuktub iddars (colloquial)

"let's write the lesson".

-xalliihum maabjiin (colloquial)

"let them keep going".

-xalliina Saabriin (colloquial)

"let's be patient".

Imperative structures marked by da^{C} -/xalli are formally different from 'plain' imperatives in that they do not allow extensibility by willa la? br not'

characteristic of requests:

cf. xallii jiftah ilbaab "let him open the door".

xallii jiftah ilbaab willa la? "Shall I let him open the door or not"

ʔaxallii jiftah ilbaab "Shall I let him open the door?"

(ii) First Person Exclusive:

realized by the absence of xall.

D. Insistence

(i) Insistent: In non-colloquial formal speech "insistence" is expressed by the addition of the emphatic suffix - nn nuun ittawkiid ithaqiila, e.g.,

saa^{C}id ilfaqiir 'help the poor' "non-emphatic"

saa^{C}idann alfaqiir 'help the poor' "emphatic"

(ii) non-insistent: realised by the absence of -nn.

E. Negation

(i) Negative: adding an initial negative particle laa or maa is sufficient to negate 2nd and 3rd person imperatives

-iftah ilbaab 'open the door': laa taftah ilbaab

"Don't open the door."

-waahad jiftaH ilbaab: wala waahad jiftah ilbaab
'Don't anyone open the door'.

(ii) Non-negative: realized by the absence of a negative particle.

The structures which underlie imperative clauses are shown below, and represent NPvoc. (Vocative Noun Phrase), Vimp (Imperative Verb-form, Pron. (Pronoun):-

1. Specification:
   (i) Specified:
   Vimp + NPvoc. - ʔuktub ya mustafa "Write down, Mustafa"
   (ii) Unspecified:
   Vimp - ta^{C}aal huna "come here"

2. Impatience:
   (i) Impatient:
   Pron + (NPvoc. + Post-mod.Rel. Clause) Vimp
   ʔant (ya saalim yalli ma-btisma^{C}) ta^{C}aal huna
   (ii) Patient:
   Vimp - ta^{C}aal.

3. Person:
   (i) 1st person Inclusive
   da^{C} / xall + pron. 1st pers. + Vimperfect - xalliini ʔusalli 'Let me pray'
   (ii) 1st person Exclusive
   V- imp - Salli 'pray'

4. Insistence:
   (i) Insistent: Vimp + emphatic' morph. - nna + (N)
   ʔunsuranna ʔaxaak 'help your brother'
   (ii) Non-Insistent:
   Vimp + N ʔunsur ʔaxaak 'help your brother'

5. Negation:
   (i) Negative:
   Neg. Particle + Vimp - laa taftah 'Don't open'
   (ii) Non-negative:
   Vimp - ʔiftah 'open'.

English Imperative Sentences

The following analysis of utterances is an attempt to classify the nuclei of imperative structures recognizable by the native speaker of English.

A. Specification

(i) Specified, in which the imperative verb-form is extensible by a vocative noun phrase, e.g. Nora, play on my side. The vocative noun phrase is distinguished from the subject of an imperative sentence (e.g. you sit here) in that it occurs in initial, medial and final position in the sentence; the subject in the commands always precedes the verb. Furthermore, when the vocative is placed initially, it has a separate tone unit; the subject merely receives ordinary word stress.

(ii) Unspecified: realized by the absence of a vocative noun phrase.

B. Impatience

(i) Impatient: realized by the 2nd person pronoun you or 3rd person pronoun someone, e.g. you come here, You mind your own business. The subject pronoun you differs from a finite verb subject in that it is always stressed; these commands usually express strong irritation or annoyance:

Somebody open the window.

Everybody shut their eyes.

(ii) Patient - realized by the absence of you (or someone).

C. Person

(i) First Person Inclusive - realized by presence of let's e.g., let's start.

(ii) First Person Exclusive - realized by the absence of let's.

It is noticeable that whereas all commands require some action to be done, only 'let imperatives' include the speaker in the proposed action. Third person imperatives are not very common in English giving way to more appropriate constructions initiated by had better: They had better go by bus.

D. Insistence

(i) Insistent:

This type is characterised by presence of the emphatic form do with a tonic stress, e.g. Do sing, Do let's sing and don't let's sing. The choice of these forms depends on a context of situation demanding emphatic speech or when the speaker is particularly interested in giving greater intensity of meaning.

(ii) Non-insistent: realised by absence of the emphatic form do.

E. Negation

(i) Negative:- characterised by presence of the particle not/n't and a tonic stress on the last stressed syllable, e.g. don't smoke here, let's not smoke here.

(ii) Non-negative - realised by the absence of the negative particle.

The structures are shown below and represent NP (Noun Phrase) V (lexical Verb)

v (operator), Nvoc (Vocative Noun Phrase)

A (i) Specified: Nvoc. + V - Nora, sing.

(ii) Unspecified: V - Sing.

B (i) Impatient: NP + V - You sing.

(ii) Patient: V - Sing.

C (i) 1st Pers. Inclusive: let's + V Let's sing.

(ii) 1st Pers. Exclusive V sing.

D (i) Insistent: V let's V - Do let's sing.

(ii) Non-insistent: let's V - let's sing.

E (i) Inclusive Neg. Insistent: Vn't let's V - Don't let's sing.

(ii) Inclusive Neg. Non-Insistent: let's not V - let's not sing.

(iii) Inclusive Non-Neg. Insistent: V let's V - DO let's sing.

(iv) Inclusive Non-Neg. Non-Insistent: let's + V - let's sing.

(v) Exclusive Neg. Insistent - vn't + V - DON'T sing.

(vi) Exclusive Non-Neg. Insistent - vV - Do sing.

(vii) Exclusive Non-Neg. Non-Insistent. - Sing.

DON'T sing and Don't SING types (v) and (vi) are differentiated by the stress position, which are negative insistent and negative non-insistent, respectively.

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It is noticeable that both Arabic and English make use of parallel syntactic contrasts of terms of commands, but the terms in each system are not co-extensive.

Differences between the terms are due to different situational as well as linguistic contexts.

I. Situational

(a) Politeness:

It is generally recognized that commands sound abrupt or rude unless certain forms indicative of politeness are added; the addition of please makes the request or command more polite, e.g. please wait for me.

The addition of a question-tag, will you or would you mind/ do you mind are generally polite and deferential, e.g., would you (do you) mind putting them in the car.

The essential point to notice is that whereas deferential polite forms are normally exchanged between close friends and relatives in the English family surrounding, they are rarely used in similar Arabic situations.

(b) Emphasis:

In English, one element in a situation may be given special prominence for contrast with another or for intensity of meaning, the emphasis having the linguistic experience of tonic stress. Although there is a tendency to use a rise in pitch in requests and a fall in commands whether an utterance is a request or a command depends on the implicative role of intonation (Cf. Lee, 1956). Other things being equal, distinction between commands and requests in Arabic depends on factors other than stress, e.g. voice quality, context and the addressee.

II. Linguistic

(a) 'Emphatic' or persuasive imperative in English, addition of do makes the command more emphatic e.g. do be careful. Do have a good time. Do let's have a walk.

In Arabic, emphatic - nn added to the imperative verb - form occurs only in formal (i.e. non-colloquial) register.

(b) Impatient Imperative:-

In English, commands with a prenominal subject are usually admonitory in tone, and frequently express strong irritation. The addition of Arabic 2nd or 3rd person pronoun seems to function as a pronoun of address and the implication of its use is no more than directing the listener's attention.

Notes

* The Arabic here dealt with is fairly generally spoken by 'educated' Jordanians. Formal (non-colloquial) utterances are indicated by (non-colloquial) where appropriate.

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